Hyper-diversity in/and geographies of childhood and youth

Kraftl, Peter; Bolt, Gideon; van Kempen, Ronald

DOI:
10.1080/14649365.2018.1491619

Hyper-diversity in/and geographies of childhood and youth

Peter Kraftl[a*], Gideon Bolt[b] and Ronald van Kempen †[b]

[a]*School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B15 2TT, United Kindgom;* [b]*Faculty of Geosciences, Vening Meineszgebouw A Princetonlaan 8a Room 6.38, 3584 CB, Utrecht, The Netherlands*

This paper reviews recent work on childhood, youth and diversity in geography. It argues for a need to move from superdiversity to hyperdiversity. Such a move recognises how multiple facets of social difference extend beyond commonly-used identity categories deployed in intersectional or superdiverse analyses. In particular, the notion of hyperdiversity enables an exploration of how identity categories articulate with materialities, feelings and everyday practices. The paper sets out some starting propositions for theorisations of hyperdiversity, childhood and youth, whilst recognising the need for critical reflection upon the term's usefulness, especially when set alongside other conceptual languages for understanding intersections of age with other forms of difference. Finally, the paper introduces the four articles that comprise this special issue.

Keywords: Children's Geographies, Difference, Diversity, Intersectionality, Materialities, Emotion and affect

Childhood, youth and (super-)diversity

Difference, diversity, identity, (sub)culture and lifestyle have for decades been staple analytical concepts for scholars of childhood and youth. Across geography, sociology, cultural studies, anthropology and education studies, researchers have proposed a bewildering array of terms to deal with the manifold (sub)groupings that are both created by young people, and into which they are corralled by adults (e.g. Skelton and Valentine, 1998; Matthews and Limb, 1999; Hodkinson, 2016).

Debates about young people's diversity are also set within the wider contexts of popular, policy and academic discourses around diversity, which have, if anything, intensified in recent years. In the context of riots, uprisings and migratory (especially asylum) processes – which have generally been reported negatively – scholars in social, cultural and

*Corresponding author. Email: p.kraftl@bham.ac.uk

urban geography have grappled with notions of 'superdiversity'. Vertovec (2007) has, for instance, theorised Western cities as *cities of super-diversity*, with reference to their increasing *ethnic* diversity. Thus, the notion of super-diversity denotes a shift from the identification of fairly large, clearly-defined ethnic groups to a picture of increasing complexity (Vertovec, 2017). As a result, analyses of (particularly) the articulation of ethnic identities with urban change have become increasingly fine-grained, with, for instance, a rich seam of recent work in social and cultural geography focusing upon everyday encounters in multicultural cities (e.g. Swanton, 2010; Wilson, 2017; Bennett et al., 2017; Jackson et al., 2017).

Relatedly, geographers have engaged increasingly with intersectional analyses of identities. Whilst not necessarily tethered to forms of *urban* diversity – and whilst couched in feminist politics of gender, race and class (e.g. Crenshaw, 1991) – the notion of intersectionality affords an opportunity to move away from any one identity category perhaps more than at least the more literal interpretations of super-diversity (Vertovec, 2017). It also enables analyses that are attuned to the exercise of power relations: "the simultaneous, intersecting, inseparable, coterminous and multiple forces of oppression acting on individuals/groups" (Chadwick, 2017, p. 6).

Whilst always framed by questions of difference and diversity (Matthews and Limb, 1999), research on the geographies of children and young people has arguably begun to become more attuned to such questions over the past decade (Pyer et al., 2010; Konstantoni and Emejulu, 2017). Following Hopkins and Pain's (2007) call for more 'relational geographies of age', geographers have explored an array of intersecting differences – culminating, for instance, in a recent issue of *Children's Geographies* on intersectionality that, in particular, examined articulations of gender, religion and ethnicity with the experiences of children and young people (Esson, 2015; Konstantoni et al., 2017). Rather

than review this literature here, it is worth noting more specifically that geographers working with children and young people have begun to engage the frame of superdiversity in their analyses. For instance, a range of studies has explored the development of children's friendships (and parental responses) as children encounter difference within superdiverse settings, and especially within schools (e.g. Vincent et al., 2017; Askins, 2016). In so doing, we gain a rich, nuanced picture of how children and young people foster senses of belonging that are dynamic and situational, and which may transcend complex, intersecting differences as much as they may lead to inward-looking, defensive or insular acts (Visser, 2017; Ticar, 2018).

Towards geographies of *hyper*-diversity?

Notwithstanding the above advances in theorising and studying super-diversity and intersectionality, recently, Tasan-Kok et al. (2014) have argued that the concept of super-diversity is too simplistic. They posit *hyper-diversity* as a way of scrutinising how cities are not only diverse in ethnic, demographic and socioeconomic terms, but in terms of the *attitudes*, *lifestyles*, *behaviours* and *materialities* that cut across more traditional identity categories (also Peterson, 2017; Sichling, 2017; Wilkinson, 2017). For instance, an individual's eating habits, or their leisure pursuits, or even their emotional disposition to particular places in a city, may differ quite markedly from those of others in the same superdiverse sub-group. Elsewhere, an individual's habitual encounters with the materialities of place – for instance through parkour (Mould, 2009), cycling (Spinney, 2009) or walking (Middleton, 2010) – may produce, cut through, obscure or frame their experiences of 'traditional' identity categories such as class. Indeed, it may therefore be the case that some of the apparently 'non-representational' preoccupations of poststructural, postfeminist and new-materialist scholarship – affect, materiality, habit, everydayness – may be absolutely

central to experiences of diversity and the (representational) identity politics that often accompany such experiences.

In this latter vein, nonrepresentational, postfeminist and new-materialist theorisations of childhood (which some commentators have recently termed a 'new wave', others, an 'infra-paradigm') have challenged the primacy of representation in understanding young people's everyday lives (Horton and Kraftl, 2006; Ryan, 2012; Kraftl, 2012, 2013; Oswell, 2013). This latter work has critiqued and sought to extend beyond representational identity categories of any kind – whether 'traditional' (class, ethnicity or gender) or culturally contingent and/or ephemeral (subcultures, tribes, gangs). Yet the potential of (what we here term for shorthand) nonrepresentational approaches to move beyond small-scale, ephemeral, even introspective concerns has been questioned by some critics (e.g. Mitchell and Elwood, 2012). Accordingly, there is a need for a concerted programme of scholarship that can theorise and empirically investigate whether and how nonrepresentational theorisations of childhood and youth can challenge and/or extend previous scholarship on socio-cultural differences amongst young people.

Arguably, however, the dividing lines between self-defined 'nonrepresentational' and other scholarship are fairly blurred. On the one hand, in schematising seven different deployments of the term 'superdiversity' since its inception, Vertovec (2017: 7) argues that the seventh, final and potentially rather productive tendency has been to introduce 'new or other complexities'. These he breaks down into three moves: to examine the nonlinear trajectories of migrants; the fluidity of ethnic categories and the diversity of individuals and groups themselves (for instance in terms of language); and, (briefly) new social formations, by which Vertovec is in the main focusing on power relations and hierarchies within migrant groups. In our view, however, whilst *beginning* to emphasise the dynamic, performative and contingent ways in which superdiverse identities and spaces extend beyond traditional social

(and especially ethnic) identity categories, these 'new or other complexities' are far more extensive. Whether this is a limitation of the term superdiversity or simply the ways in which it has been deployed thus far – remaining tethered to rather more traditional identity categories, even if these are emergent or complicated – is hard to say. However, it is our sense in positing the term *hyper-diversity* that some of the *attitudes*, *lifestyles*, *behaviours* and *materialities* cited above, and exemplified in this special issue, are not (quite) captured by the term superdiversity. In that light, and as we detail below, we use this special issue not as a platform to uncritically support a newer term (hyper-diversity) but to critically assess its value within contexts and case studies that to some extent push at the boundaries of definitions of 'superdiversity'.

On the other hand, recent work – albeit not necessarily under the banner of super- or hyper-diversity, or intersectionality – has examined some of the ways in which diverse, perhaps banal, everyday performances, materialities, emotions and affects articulate with and produce social difference (see Horton and Kraftl, 2017, for a critical review). For instance, Nayak's (2010) work on everyday racisms in a peripheral, predominantly white suburban community in the UK examines how the apparently ordinary spaces of suburbia – bus stops, shop fronts, lampposts – become a medium for expressions of racial hatred. Elsewhere, Lobo (2016) provides a rich analysis of how encounters between aboriginal and white-settler residents of Darwin, Australia, are coded through forms of geo-power – through bodily connections with landscape such as eating and painting. Lobo (2016, p. 68) argues that these are forms of geo-power: a non-human form of power that precedes and exceeds human social relations, [providing] the possibility to reconfigure anti-racist agendas" by instituting new or surprising encounters with difference that can challenge or transcend extant racial hierarchies through their eminently materialised, performative and affecting qualities. Quite differently, in their analyses of the socio-material entanglements of watercourses, rats and smeared waste

materials with questions of class- and race-based tensions, Horton and Kraftl (2017) argue for a conception of 'extra-sectionality' that retains the political purchase of 'inter-sectionality' yet acknowledges the often elusive, unglamorous, hidden-in-plain-sight and unbounded material processes that produce social difference.

All-too-often, as Vertovec (2017, p. 3-4) also argues, such analyses draw upon super-diversity as simply denoting "[v]ery much diversity" or as a "[b]ackdrop to a study". In these ways, intersectionality and super-diversity may be used in ways that are fairly static, as uncontested (even a-political) matters of fact, or as a way of acknowledging a range of factors of characteristics that frame or justify a study. Yet, as Staunæs (2003) has argued, conceptions of intersectionality (and by extension, super-diversity) need to be dynamic and aware of the performativity of identity. All of the above studies take on this challenge, forging more performative and materialised accounts of social difference. Yet, a key challenge that guides this special issue is whether the concept of *hyper-diversity* can help (or hinder) the development of such increasingly nuanced and dynamic understandings of diversity. The starting point of this special issue is not so much that – as a 'background to a study' – there are particular places that are 'hyper-diverse'. Rather, in a more dynamic and analytical sense, it is to ask whether in places that have been identified as *super-diverse*, there exist particular *attitudes*, *lifestyles*, *behaviours* and *materialities* whose complexities push beyond the seven (or more) ways of "[t]alking around super-diversity" (Vertovec, 2017, p. 1). We ask: how do contexts of superdiversity intersect with socio-spatial processes and everyday practices of hyper-diversity? How do nonrepresentational (and other) concerns intersect with the pressing politics, everyday experiences and media/policy representations of super-diversity? Indeed, without wishing to promote a particular theoretical framing for questions of hyper-diversity, to what extent *can* nonrepresentational theories help articulate, complicate or extend beyond more traditional, 'representational' analyses of difference,

diversity and identity politics – and what complementary theoretical frames might be required?

The latter question also raises implications for the political implications of thinking with hyper-diversity. On the one hand, there is a risk that in attending to the ever-more granular concerns of attitudes, lifestyles, behaviours and materialities, the political potentialities of (for instance) intersectionality are watered down. In particular, questions can be raised about whether the particularities and ephemeralities of lifestyles-as-lived, in the moment, could ever afford a more thorough-going sense of political affiliation or allegiance. Thus, the possibilities for a politics of recognition or solidarity – whether across or within identity groups – might be dissolved. On the other hand, and as several of the authors cited in the preceding paragraphs note, it is precisely through a recognition of the nonrepresentational, the embodied, and the material, that political concerns and challenges are either raised or heightened. A key challenge then – which is broached by several papers in this special issue – is to articulate ways of being, knowing and talking that can enable diverse young people to cope with the exigencies of rapid urban change (as per Melissa Butcher's paper), or with the material markers of social injustice (as per the paper by Karen Witten and colleagues).

The papers in this special issue

This special issue brings together theoretical and empirical research on children and young people with ideas of hyper-diversity. As noted above, there has been plenty of scholarship that has scrutinised (and questioned) how *everyday* experiences of diversity may or may not lead to progressive forms of living with difference, and examined how urban *affects* articulate longstanding forms of social difference. However, there is a need to broaden – empirically – the scope of such studies. In particular – through case studies as diverse as

community radio stations, and hanging out – we seek to use the notion of 'hyper-diversity' to ask how more diverse sets of practices may supplement or challenge previous thinking about difference. Critically, these practices are sometimes situated within, but often extend beyond, the *urban* realm (cf. Tasan-Kok et al., 2014). A more specific – but no less important – contribution of this special issue is to more thoroughly analyse (still nascent) theorisations of hyper-diversity in respect of *children and young people*, who have, aside from the examples cited above, largely been absent from such theorisations thus far. In addition, the publication of this special issue in the pages of *Social and Cultural Geography* (rather than either a childhood/youth or urban studies journal) reflects our commitment to combining and further broadening these debates beyond subdisciplinary silos. In the above contexts, this special issue has two inter-related aims. Firstly, to critically assess whether and how the concept of 'hyper-diversity' can challenge and extend extant scholarship on diversity amongst children and young people. Secondly, and recursively, to challenge and extend broader recent work on the social and cultural geographies of diversity, through the notion of hyper-diversity.

In the above light, rather than start (only) with a traditionally-defined sub-group of young people (identified by class, ethnicity, or gender), each of the papers starts with a performance, practice, interest or emotional disposition. Whilst acknowledging that, for decades, youth studies scholars have focussed on homologies (and inconsistencies) of dress, taste, music, technology, behaviour and more, the papers in this special issue ask how often apparently banal forms of everyday practice articulate (or do not articulate) with contemporary concerns about (youthful) diversities. They ask whether notions of hyper-diversity have the power to bring together often separate strands of scholarship on social and cultural geographies of difference, youth (sub)cultures, geographies of childhood and youth, and a 'nonrepresentational' childhood studies, and whether such notions might have the political power to 'speak back' to complex popular debates about youth diversity.

Melissa Butcher's paper is set within a diverse and rapidly-gentrifying area of East London. Butcher complicates recent studies of urban classed and racialised encounters through a detailed participatory project in which the importance of practices and identities around dress and food emerged as crucial to the negotiation of difference. In so doing – and whilst resonating with earlier subcultures work on the significance of dress to group identities – Butcher affords a rich sense of how these everyday practices opened up a *diversity* (rather than a homology) of ways of adapting to rapid urban change that ranged from avoidance to empathy.

While Butcher's paper emphasizes the need to pay attention to young people's capacity for reflexivity in their management of difference, Noora Pyyry and Sirpa Tani focus on the appropriation of urban space by young people as politics preceding thought and reflection. In their analysis of more-than-human playful politics of dwelling with the city, they offer a rich and nuanced account of how young people's everyday urban practices open up (as well as foreclose) multiple experiences of and engagements with diversity. They focus upon events of what they term 'spatial reworking' – surprising, contingent engagements with the city – that, in line with the broad definition of hyper-diversity advanced above, are thoroughly suffused with and by the materialities of the city itself. It is as if the city – and its constituent elements such as temporary barriers and rails – are active in the production of dwelling-through-play. For Pyyry and Tani, these forms of spatial re-working enable a (re)focusing upon *age-based* diversities in particular – and of looking to potentially intergenerational, alternative conditions in which young people's presence in public spaces might not only be tolerated but valued.

Karen Witten, Robin Kearns, Penelope Carroll and Lanuola Asiasiga also focus upon play, albeit through a focus upon younger children in the context of inner city and suburban spaces in Auckland. By their presence and activities children contribute to the diversity of

place. The paper examines how entanglements of play and mobility (also Horton et al., 2014) produce temporal and affective changes when encountering some very particular forms of difference, such as homelessness. Here – as Witten et al. show – if we are to develop notions of hyper-diversity sensitively, it is important not to (albeit accidentally) romanticise homelessness or other forms of marginalisation as 'lifestyle' differences, even if the *markers* of such forms of difference do not so readily conform to definitions of super-diversity. In other words, if hyper-diversity is to be a useful term, it must (continue to) enable understandings of both potentially progressive and potentially deleterious socio-spatial formations (as Butcher's paper also demonstrates so neatly). Thus, working with children, Witten et al. (re)engage with the material details of urban spaces – with trees and slides – to examine how children's encounters with social injustices are manifest in Auckland (also Lobo, 2016; Horton and Kraftl, 2017).

Finally, Catherine Wilkinson's paper operates on a rather different sensory register: sound. Through an analysis of a youth-led community radio station in Liverpool, she analyses how styles of speaking within one language enable young people to distinguish boundaries and what she terms 'out-groups' in relation to conceptions of 'ordinariness'. Building upon recent work on the articulation of language with social difference in multicultural societies, and upon recent work on sonic geographies, Wilkinson argues that the radio station function as a micro space which forges affective 'bridges' between different localities in the city. Herein, as Wilkinson puts it, her paper affords a continued sense of the micropolitics of intergroup identities and social interactions (Kallio and Häkli, 2013), but where a focus on sonic *performances* extends and complicates the most commonplace analyses of super-diversity and of urban encounter. Moreover, arguably, given the ways in which radio operates across space, Wilkinson's paper also extends *beyond* the micropolitical – beyond the

embodied immediacy of encounter – to afford a sense of the multi- or –de-scaled articulation of youth agency (Ansell, 2009).

Acknowledgments

We wish to thank the contributors to this special issue and the participants of the *Young Divercities* seminar (Utrecht University, November 2015). This seminar was funded from the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme for research, technological development and demonstration under grant agreement No. 319970. SSH.2012.2.2.2-1; Governance of cohesion and diversity in urban contexts. We also wish to thank the Editors of *Social and Cultural Geography* for their support and guidance in the development of this special issue. This editorial and the special issue are dedicated to the memory of Ronald van Kempen, who tragically passed away shortly after the seminar upon which this special issue is based. Ronald's leadership and intellect was central to the inception of this special issue and a much broader programme of work on urban diversity; he was a continued source of inspiration and support for so many geographers and urban scholars.

References

Ansell, N. (2009). Childhood and the politics of scale: descaling children's geographies?. *Progress in Human Geography*, *33*, 190-209.

Askins, K. (2016). Emotional citizenry: Everyday geographies of befriending, belonging and intercultural encounter. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, *41*, 515-527.

Bennett, K., Cochrane, A., Mohan, G., & Neal, S. (2017). Negotiating the educational spaces of urban multiculture: Skills, competencies and college life, *Urban Studies*, *54*, 2305-2321.

Chadwick, R. (2017). Thinking intersectionally with/through narrative methodologies, *Agenda, 31*, 5-16.

Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color, *Stanford Law Review*, 1241-1299.

Esson, J. (2015). You have to try your luck: male Ghanaian youth and the uncertainty of football migration, *Environment and Planning A, 47* 1383-1397.

Hodkinson, P. (2016). Youth cultures and the rest of life: subcultures, post-subcultures and beyond. *Journal of Youth Studies, 19*, 629-645.

Hopkins, P. & Pain, R. (2007). Geographies of age: thinking relationally, *Area, 39*, 287-294.

Horton, J. & Kraftl, P. (2006). What else? Some more ways of thinking and doing 'Children's Geographies', *Children's geographies, 4*, 69-95.

Horton, J. & Kraftl, P. (2017). Rats, assorted shit and 'racist groundwater': Towards extra-sectional understandings of childhoods and social-material processes, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space,* online early.

Jackson, L., Harris, C. & Valentine, G. (2017). Rethinking concepts of the strange and the stranger, *Social & Cultural Geography, 18*, 1-15.

Kallio, K. & Häkli, J. (2013). Children and young people's politics in everyday life, *Space and Polity, 17*, 1-16.

Konstantoni, K., Kustatscher, M. & Emejulu, A. (2017). Travelling with intersectionality across time, place and space, *Children's Geographies, 15*, 1-5.

Konstantoni, K. & Emejulu, A. (2017). When intersectionality met childhood studies: the dilemmas of a travelling concept, *Children's Geographies, 15*, 6-22.

Kraftl, P. (2012). Utopian promise or burdensome responsibility? A critical analysis of the UK government's Building Schools for the Future policy, *Antipode*, *44*, 847-870.

Kraftl, P. (2013). Beyond 'voice', beyond 'agency', beyond 'politics'? Hybrid childhoods and some critical reflections on children's emotional geographies, *Emotion, Space and Society*, *9*, 13-23.

Lobo, M. (2016). Geo power in public spaces of Darwin, Australia: exploring forces that unsettle phenotypical racism, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *39*, 68-86.

Matthews, H. & Limb, M. (1999). Defining an agenda for the geography of children: review and prospect, *Progress in Human Geography*, *23*, 61-90.

Middleton, J. (2010). Sense and the city: exploring the embodied geographies of urban walking, *Social & Cultural Geography*, *11*, 575-596.

Mitchell, K. & Elwood, S. (2012). Mapping children's politics: the promise of articulation and the limits of nonrepresentational theory. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, *30*, 788-804.

Mould, O. (2009). Parkour, the city, the event, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, *27*, 738-750.

Nayak, A. (2010). Race, affect, and emotion: young people, racism, and graffiti in the postcolonial English suburbs, *Environment and Planning A*, *42*, 2370-2392.

Oswell, D. (2013). *The agency of children: From family to global human rights*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Peterson, M. (2017). Living with difference in hyper-diverse areas: how important are encounters in semi-public spaces?. *Social & Cultural Geography*, *18*, 1067-1085.

Pyer, M., Horton, J., Tucker, F., Ryan, S. and Kraftl, P. (2010). Children, young people and 'disability': challenging children's geographies?, *Children's Geographies*, *8*, 1-8.

Ryan, K. (2012). The new wave of childhood studies: Breaking the grip of bio-social dualism?. *Childhood*, *19*, 439-452.

Sichling, F. (2017). Diversity on the urban margin: The influence of social networks on the transition to adulthood of disadvantaged immigrant youth. *Geoforum*, online early.

Skelton, T. & Valentine, G. (1998). *Cool places: Geographies of youth cultures*. London: Routledge.

Spinney, J. (2009). Cycling the city: Movement, meaning and method. *Geography Compass*, *3*, 817-835.

Staunæs, D. (2003). Where have all the subjects gone? Bringing together the concepts of intersectionality and subjectification, *Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research, 11*, 101-110.

Swanton, D. (2010). Sorting bodies: race, affect, and everyday multiculture in a mill town in northern England, *Environment and Planning A, 42*, 2332-2350.

Tasan-Kok, T., van Kempen, R., Raco, M. & Bolt, G. (2014). *Towards Hyper-Diversified European Cities: A critical literature review*. Utrecht: Utrecht University: Faculty of Geosciences.

Ticar, J. (2018). Embodied transnational lives among Filipina/o/x youth in urban educational spaces, *Gender, Place & Culture*, *25*, 612-616.

Vertovec, S. (2007). Super-diversity and its implications, *Ethnic and racial studies, 30*, 1024-1054.

Vertovec, S. (2017). Talking around super-diversity. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, online early.

Vincent, C., Neal, S. & Iqbal, H. (2017). Encounters with diversity: Children's friendships and parental responses, *Urban Studies, 54*, 1974-1989.

Visser, K. (2017). "Because we're all different"–Everyday experiences of belonging among young people from immigrant backgrounds in Tottenham, *Geoforum*, online early.

Wilkinson, S. (2017). Young people's drinking spaces and Im/Mobilities: a case of 'hyper-diversity'?, *Journal of Youth Studies*, online early.

Wilson, H. (2017). On geography and encounter: Bodies, borders, and difference, *Progress in Human Geography*, 41, 451–471.